



INTERIORS:

Picture Perfect

What started as a renovation becomes a journey of rediscovery for a busy Upper East Side couple • BY SYDNEY LEBLANC • PHOTOS BY GROSS & DALEY

ABOVE: French 1940s chairs from Rooms and Gardens encircle a custom-made table designed by Glenn Gissler; the late-19th-century chandelier is from Historical Materialism. On the far wall, a mirror designed by Gissler was made by Bark Frameworks. AT RIGHT: A 1950s Italian ceramic pitcher becomes an outstanding sculpture when placed atop an art deco coin collector's cabinet from Maison Gerard in the living room. A late-18th-century English hall chair from Gomez Associates is paired with a 1930s engraving by Martin Lewis titled Corner Shadows.



THREE YEARS AGO, A COUPLE had a surprising realization that would prompt them to change their East 75th Street apartment entirely. They couldn't remember ever having had a meaningful conversation in their living room. Its super-safe traditional style just never engaged them; it never felt right, and they didn't spend much time there. Their largest, most prominent room seemed strangely off-limits, a nowhere land lurking beneath their own roof.

"We wanted to branch out, to live all over the house," the wife says she came to realize.

The seven-room apartment had been renovated ten years before but more recently had fallen out of sync with all the complexities of daily life — the couple's two busy careers on Wall Street, their teenage son, their affection for books and art. And the

Easy chairs from Jonas flank the living room fireplace; the 1940s Marsden Hartley painting is aptly titled Red Flowers in a Purple Vase. An early-20th-century Indian rug is from Doris Leslie Blau.

apartment's traditional scheme was at odds with the wife's most treasured works of art: a small collection of social-realist paintings her parents had bought in the 1930s from New York City's struggling artists.

"Those pictures were very much a part of my visual world from childhood," the wife recalls.

In the beginning, however, the couple approached the new renovation with limited goals. When they called Glenn Gissler, a New York City designer whose clients include Michael Kors and Caroline's Comedy Club owner Caroline Hirsch, they requested



fresh paint colors, a few new pieces of furniture, better storage, and, the wife says, "somewhere to rest your eyes."

In Gissler they found the perfect guide — a man who describes himself as an "organic" designer, "not a cookie cutter." He takes great interest in "the interface where people, places, and objects come together," and he especially enjoys being able to bring them into proper balance — exactly what was needed in this case.

With a degree in architecture from the Rhode Island School of Design, Gissler straddles the worlds of architecture and interior design. He's also a psychologically astute design detective. He finds that his organic approach works best when he can elicit interesting answers to some fundamental questions: Who am I? How do I want to live? What's really important to me?

"It was like going into the abyss," the wife says. "We talked about everything. Glenn probably ended up knowing us better than we know ourselves. I think he could tell you the height of our socks." From these discussions — bolstered by Gissler's preliminary sketches of the architectural possibilities — it became clear

Glenn Gissler designed the entry hall chandelier and custom bookcases. The Tibetan carpet is by Odegard, the antique bench from Les Deux Iles.

that a total overhaul was in order.

The interior transformation began with what Gissler calls "architectural corrections," a restructuring of the walls and openings to maximize space, light, and views. "It's amazing," the wife says. "He made every room smaller, by moving walls and lowering — yes, lowering — some of the ceilings and adding enormous amounts of storage, but the whole house seems miraculously bigger."

The new, clean-lined architecture became a suitable backdrop for a collection of eclectic furniture pieces with interesting shapes and many soft curves.

Ironically, Gissler wrought an astonishing visual coherence by using wildly diverse furnishings — each with individual distinction. In the foyer, there's an art deco console, a 1920s Austrian



chandelier, a Ning Xai Chinese rug, and a Gissler-designed bookcase. The living room combines an 18th-century English hall chair, a pair of 19th-century Russian chairs, a Biedermeier table, a Regency spoon-back chair, an art deco coin collector's cabinet, and 1950s Italian ceramics Gissler purchased in Paris. In the dining room a custom table is paired with 1940s French chairs, along with 18th-century Tibetan cabinets and custom floor lamps that Gissler designed. In the bedroom, a 1950s bronze-and-pewter-framed mirror hangs above a Tommy Parzinger dresser. Bedside lamps designed by Gissler are made of old industrial parts.

As Gissler points out, "The richness comes from the weave." Enhancing the richness is a mellow color scheme of beige, cream, and green that ties the rooms together. Chosen from Donald Kaufman's "ready to wear" paint collection, these colors have an atmospheric luminosity that fills the whole house.

"What's most remarkable," Gissler says, "is that this apartment is about feeling, not fashion. It's fresh, architectural, quirky, and sophisticated. It just feels right. And, while it sounds dumb to say it, my clients are finally able to live in their living room, and spread

Granite Quarry, a 1936 painting by Lewis Lozowick, enjoys new prominence in the redesigned dining room, with its 18th-century Tibetan chests. Glenn Gissler designed the floor lamps using industrial materials.

out all over the house with their books and their art."

As if to validate Gissler's on-target design, the owners came to realize that the treasured artworks — those vigorous paintings from the 1930s — would finally have a suitable environment. Their renewed appreciation for these family heirlooms inspired them to build onto their collection of 20th-century American artists, which now includes works by Helen Frankenthaler, Milton Avery, Alice Neel, and Marsden Hartley, all recent acquisitions.

"We fell in love with the new apartment," says the wife, "and we wanted to complement that with the art."

Now the emotionally charged realist pictures, interspersed with the newer abstract works, are part of the mix that makes this house a true home. And with Glenn Gissler's help, the couple can enjoy the most important design element of all — their personal stamp, which comes through in every room. ☛

